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REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE ISSUES REVIEW

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REPORT OF A
COMPREHENSIVE ISSUES REVIEW
FOR THE SOUTHEAST RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER
AND
THE SOUTHEAST DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Review Team report is to summarize and synthesize the topics discussed during the review of the Southeast Research and Extension Center (SEREC) and Southeast District. The Review Team expects that issues identified in this report will be studied by the Faculty/Staff of the unit. It is our expectation that a plan for the implementation of the recommendations will be made or that appropriate reasons for not addressing particular issues will be identified.

The Review Team was pleased to be a part of this review process and grateful to the leadership of Dr. Randy Cantrell and Ms. Sharon Skipton and the Steering Committee in implementing the review and hosting the Review Team.

OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

The objectives for the review of the SEREC/District were described in the Issue-Based Review document distributed in August 2000. This Issue-Based Review is a snapshot in time of what Faculty/Staff believe are the emerging issues and what they believe are the best programming efforts to address these issues. Faculty/Staff identified eleven trends/issues that were addressed in their review efforts and about which much of the discussion focused.

The process of preparing for the review is one of discovery, adjustment and strategic alignment. The Review Team plays a critical role in the accountability, validation and potential redirection process. The Review Team members individually and collectively provide a fresh look at what the Unit deems its appropriate direction to be and the process used to develop that sense of direction.

While formal reviews are conducted approximately on a five-year rotation, programs and the issues that drive them are in a constant state of evolution. As the SEREC/District strives to serve a continually changing clientele base, programs and delivery methods will change.

The Faculty/Staff of the SEREC/District expended considerable energy in carrying out this review. The self-study document reflects the careful preparation of the Faculty/Staff of SEREC/District. It was the culmination of a variety of need assessment activities. As part of the SEREC/District preparation, the Faculty/Staff divided into committees and worked both as independent and collaborative teams to develop the contents of the self-study document. The study teams have completed surveys and probes with the public in an attempt to identify critical issues and needs. SEREC/District areas of emphasis include: Youth, Agriculture, Family Life, Healthy Lifestyles, Environmental Sustainability, and Community Vision: Urban/Rural.

REVIEW PROCEDURES

Approximately four weeks prior to the review of the Southeast Research and Extension Center and Southeast District, Director Randy Cantrell forwarded copies of the SEREC/District Issue-Based Review, a self-study document, to the Review Team. At the beginning of the on-site visit Dr. Beth Birnstihl identified (with the Review Team members) issue areas for which each team member would have a major responsibility during the review. In addition to their major responsibilities, each Review Team member contributed to the overall report by making general comments and recommendations in all review areas. Based on previous issue-based reviews, the Review Team was expected to:

- Challenge existing paradigms and question the status quo
- Help the SEREC/District Faculty/Staff focus on pathfinding, alignment and empowerment
- Identify issues/concerns that may have been omitted in the document

- Ask alternative questions
- Encourage "thinking" across boundaries
- Ask why
- Ask how
- Add new dimensions
- Validate issues identified in the self-study document
- Challenge traditions
- Catalyze change

Deans Nelson and Dickey, and Vice Chancellor McBreen charged the Review Team with the following:

- Determine if the SEREC/District, Faculty/Staff had focused on priority issues in the self-study document.
- Determine if there was a breadth of citizenry involved in the planning discussions prior to the development of the self-study document.
- Determine if there were opportunities for resource enhancement to support the action plan implementation identified by the SEREC/District, Faculty/Staff.
- Determine if there were omissions in the issues identified for emphasis in the SEREC/District.
- Determine if the approaches identified for responding to the issues were appropriate.
- Determine if there was appropriate programming focus for the amount of available resource.
- Determine if there were adequate facilities and adequate resources available for the proposed amount of programming.
- Determine how SEREC/District should continue to extend services through distance education.
- Determine if the issues/plans identified, appropriately leveraged the expertise on campus, in other Research and Extension centers, and federal and state agencies.
- Determine if the southeast district was receiving appropriate opportunity to provide input to research-based needs of the region.
- Determine if there was appropriate balanced programming for large urban and agricultural constituents.
- Determine if the district was focused on serving a diverse population.
- Determine how the district can provide leadership to a large constituency of public leaders that serve in a statewide role.
- Determine if there was appropriate program emphasis on the rural/urban interface.
- Determine if there were ways to increase the communications between Educators and Specialists/Researchers located in departments and whom serve the region.
- Determine if there were opportunities to increase applied research in the district.
- Determine if the SEREC/District had made progress since the previous review.
- Assess the likelihood of continued progress in the future.
- Evaluate whether or not the Faculty/Staff of the SEREC/District were recording the program impacts.

During the three-day SEREC visit, the Review Team participated in a schedule of presentations, and question-and-answer sessions with the SEREC/District Faculty/Staff on the district-wide issues described in the self-study document, and related responsibilities of the district. Following the presentations, team members asked questions and made comments that facilitated the intent of the review, including program focus, future plans, opportunities and ways Faculty/Staff intended to achieve goals. The team also visited informally with Extension and Research Faculty/Staff. Each evening was reserved for the Review Team to meet separately and discuss the day's activities. These meetings allowed for synthesis and integration of a "Review Team" perspective on the issues addressed.

During the closing session, the Review Team presented a report of strengths, challenges/opportunities, and recommendations to Director Cantrell and the IANR Administrative Council. The Review Team then met with the Faculty/Staff and provided a brief overview of their findings.

In this report the Review Team responds to each issue area of the self-study document using the following format: strengths, challenges/opportunities, and recommendations. The Review Team responds only to those recommendations which could be addressed and would benefit from external input. The Review Team response is based on a set of working assumptions.

WORKING ASSUMPTIONS OF THE REVIEW TEAM

- All IANR units will be working with limited funding (stable to minor increases which are eroded by escalating operating expenses), at least for the next three-five years. Future programmatic changes will be achieved by redirection and/or reallocation, reduction in program scope and ability to attract grant/contract dollars.
- The urban growth of the SEREC/District will continue at an accelerated rate. While agriculture will continue to be a significant economic activity in Southeast Nebraska, the urban/rural interface and associated programming will be a major program area.
- Agriculture and natural resources will interface at the program and policy/regulatory level. Agriculture, families and community-related educational efforts will interface at the programmatic and policy level.
- There will be an increasing demand for quantitative accountability (i.e. evaluation and impact assessment) for all programs.
- Sensitivity to demographic data will be essential in making programmatic decisions.
- Youth, communities and post-secondary education are essential to the future of the SEREC/District.

- Education is a key component of economic and community survival. There continues to be a critical need to help leaders with statewide responsibilities and leaders of communities and businesses develop skills to help them maintain their competitive market advantage.
- Effective Extension programming will continue to be research driven, placing greater emphasis on Extension Educators to teach and become focused in program areas to deliver education to clientele.
- Technology will increase clientele accessibility and demand for a variety of credit/non-credit program offerings.
- Relevant applied research continues to be a priority of the SEREC/District faculty.
- Change will characterize the future, emphasizing the importance of professional development opportunities for Faculty/Staff and administrators so that they might be well positioned to address emerging issues.

OVERARCHING ISSUES

→ The Review Team supports the planning process that was utilized by the Faculty/Staff to identify and define issues for this review. We support the continuance of issue teams in Southeast Nebraska. We will not name the teams but leave that to the faculty and Dr. Cantrell to determine. We endorse the identification of program coordinators to head the teams. It is our suggestion that Dr. Cantrell and the identified program coordinators clearly define these roles in job descriptions, and plan for an ongoing communication between the district administration and the teams. It probably goes without saying, but we would like to see the program coordinator roles rotate so that many Faculty/Staff have the opportunity to lead in these roles. Of course proper communication with county boards will be necessary in this process. Our one caveat is that district teams work with the state action teams to deliver programs, and that SEREC representatives continue to be actively involved in the state teams. Keep an open communication line between state and district action teams so that programmatic efforts can be coordinated.

It is assumed, that these issue teams will be your programming model in the SEREC/District. The issues teams will also play an important role in developing extended education opportunities for Southeast Nebraska clientele. County plans of work and EPU plans will not exist.

→ A great deal about communication between Specialists and Educators, between Educators and Administrators, between Educators and Administration was heard. We acknowledge that it is an important issue. We have asked Deans Dickey and Nelson to work with the department heads and Director Cantrell to re-define roles of Specialists associated with this district, and add the SEREC/District Director as a contributing evaluator to Specialist evaluations. We want to

emphasize that communication is everyone's responsibility. We urge all of SEREC Faculty/Staff to ask Specialists to be involved just as we will ask Specialists to involve you. We encourage additional phone bridge calls between the District Director and Faculty/Staff, newsletters, etc. We wish we had an easy answer to communication issues. Your challenge is large because of the size of the district. On one hand, it is a blessing to have a large number of Educators and Assistants; on the other hand, communication becomes a bigger challenge. We urge you to continue to open as many communicative lines as possible.

→ Diversity was heard throughout the reports. We see diversity from two perspectives: programmatic and staffing. We suggest you focus SEREC/District efforts first on programmatic involvement of more diverse audiences. You already do this and we want to reaffirm what you are doing. It is suggested that a dialogue with those agencies effectively reaching diverse audiences might reveal some of the "marketing" strategies for reaching these audiences. SEREC/District Faculty/Staff recognize that this is an issue and the Review Team complement you on moving ahead.

→ Faculty/Staff gave very impressive reports throughout the review. We are concerned as a Review Team that Faculty/Staff have a limited amount of human resources (i.e. time, energy, etc.) to accomplish what you wish to accomplish. We suggest that you, as teams and with clientele involvement, further pare down your program lists. This Review Team sees the need to let go of some efforts. It was suggested by a team member to look at the life cycle of a program, be sure that programs are mission driven, and ask clientele to help identify the issues from their perspectives. We, as a Review Team, believe that involving clientele all along the road of this effort will be essential. Focus and deep market penetration of key programs will be valuable and make you more visible to the public. We realize the tug and pull this brings. We have asked Dr. Cantrell to be very visible in his support of the teams and work with stakeholders on this issue; and he certainly agrees. We also urge this district to engage Sandy Stockall and work with her in developing a process for helping focus work on the highest priorities.

→ Support additional focused Educators in the SEREC/District. Through continued definition by the issue teams and conversations with Dr. Cantrell and Dean Dickey, this can be a reality. Dr. Dickey has laid out a model of structure-following-function when it comes to focused Educators. He believes that this is a model for Nebraska's future. Nebraska will never move totally to focused Educators but this is an opportunity that needs to be studied carefully in this district.

→ The SEREC/District list of partnerships is impressive. Faculty/Staff asked about ways to maintain visibility. It is the suggestion of the Review Team that negotiation on visibility begins up front. As you work with other entities, be sure that Cooperative Extension is named as a part of the program. We're not telling you anything new. We urge that you be attentive to this need.

→ We do not support the identification of a separate metropolitan district but instead recommend the development of an urban issues team. This is an effort that needs fluidity. A separate district builds walls that the Review Team does not believe serves a purpose. Instead strive to involve those most interested in urban programming from acreage programming to urban/rural interface/to learning to work with new diverse clientele groups. Be sure to involve

stakeholders in the planning effort. They can make a valuable contribution.

→ The Review Team compliments the Faculty/Staff on support of urban and rural programming. While we believe that both are needed, we also see that the strong political leadership exerted by the urban/rural sections of this district can not be overlooked. You truly do provide the leadership for the state because of the significant business/government entities that reside here. We urge Dr. Cantrell as Director to be even more publically visible to stakeholders.

→ We believe the traditional sources of dollars (local, state and federal) are probably at best even in the amount that will be received. We suggest that new dollars will have to come from contracts, sub-contracts with other entities, grants, user fees. We do not believe that the funding from rural programs can shift to support urban programs. We believe that there are other sources of funding earmarked for urban areas that must be sought. We believe a partnership of local Educators, the District Director and state administration begin dialogues on urban funding.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES

Strengths

Within the agriculture programming area, the SEREC/District team is to be commended for producing a detailed report on the pertinent issues within each of the subheadings and identifying how SEREC/District has responded to them. The small/medium farm team did an excellent job of identifying priorities, discussing strategies, setting goals and indicating outcomes (pp30-31 of self-study document).

SEREC/District Extension Educators have provided clientele with a diversity of quality programs addressing issues of production, management, marketing as well as programs that assist in meeting certification obligations and environmental requirements during the past five years.

SEREC/District has provided leadership in developing a number of innovative programs such as the crop management and diagnostic clinics, the Nebraska Soybean and Feed Grains Profitability Project, and a soils home study course. For this reason, the SEREC/District is seen as a state leader in providing agriculture programming.

The SEREC/District agriculture team has also recognized the value of using the IANR strategic plan to set program priorities. This insures that the district's efforts are compatible with the IANR mission.

Opportunities/Challenges

There are a number of opportunities the review committee observed and would like to share. Given that one of the overarching recommendations made to SEREC/District is keeping the issue teams as an organizational structure, there is an opportunity to rethink how the agriculture program area is arranged. At present the agriculture issues team has identified five program categories (acreages, small/medium farms, large farms, agribusiness/consultants, and structure of agriculture under which are listed crops, animals, agribusiness, and public policy as subgroupings.) The Review Team's concern is whether this organization is the most appropriate for forming teams. Many of the issues overlap to some degree, especially among the small/medium farm, large farm, and agribusiness/consultant clientele. Also, many of the issues discussed in the acreage team report are more in keeping with urban programming and environmental sustainability than agriculture. Appropriately defined teams will strengthen programming by focusing the effort and eliminating confusion relative to where responsibilities lie. A strong team will also address the issues raised by the agribusiness/consultant team regarding better coordination of programs, development of an effective marketing plan, determination of fee structures, etc. (p. 40)

As identified by the agriculture issues team, small and medium-sized farms have difficulty generating enough income to maintain a reasonable standard of living. One strategy identified to address this issue was the development of alternative agriculture (Prioritizing Programmatic Needs; C. Developing Alternative Agriculture, page 29). Another opportunity lies in identifying and developing value-added products. This is especially true in the Southeast District. As the report points out, SEREC/District contains 63% of the state's population and its two largest metropolitan areas. This large population base provides opportunities in both alternative agriculture enterprises and value-added agriculture for the district's producers. Research efforts within IANR and Extension programming will play a vital role in the district's ability to capture the benefits from these opportunities.

Animal agriculture provides another opportunity for SEREC/District Research faculty and Extension Educators to provide additional economic opportunities within the district. On page 46, the report states that animal agriculture makes up more than 2/3 of the total agriculture revenue in the State. It is also important to note that research indicates where a community's agriculture includes livestock enterprises, the impact on the income and vitality of the community is greater than where agriculture is solely crop based. As farmers seek ways to capture greater income through value-added enterprises, the potential for opportunities in animal agriculture appear to be as great as with crop enterprises. This potential should be further explored.

As urban dwellers continue to seek rural living settings, there is an opportunity to assist public decision makers in determining the impact of this activity on the county's agriculture, natural resources, public infrastructure, and private economy. Understanding the costs and benefits will greatly assist decision-makers in determining appropriate land use activities through comprehensive planning and zoning regulations. Providing effective programming in this area may be the most important impact the University can have to insure healthy agriculture economies in many SEREC/District counties.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the agricultural issues team engage its members and its stakeholders in reviewing the district's needs for programming in relation to the Extension resources available. Through this process, priorities should be set regarding subject areas both to be addressed and to be eliminated. It is very difficult to develop top quality programming when resources are spread too thin. Given the political climate that Extension operates within, it is important that support for this prioritization process be forthcoming from the Institute, District and stakeholder leadership.

As visioning and listening to stakeholders identifies important issues, the Review Team encourages the issue team to look for opportunities to create focused assignments in the highest priority areas. Although limited resources relative to the District's needs prevents every educator from focusing on an issue, where it is possible, the expertise developed can be very beneficial to the district and beyond.

If, as recommended, the issue team is continued as the planning structure in the SEREC/District, we feel the agriculture issue area should be revisited to determine the most effective program division. The initial time and effort spent determining the most appropriate subject area teams will greatly enhance the teams' future effectiveness.

It is recommended that consideration be given to placing greater emphasis on developing programs addressing the opportunities that exist in value-added agriculture. The demographics of the SEREC/District are conducive for developing value-added, niche market, and alternative agriculture opportunities. IANR has several units that have valuable expertise for assisting interested parties in exploring these alternatives. These units include the Food Processing Center, the Industrial Agricultural Products Center and the Center for Applied Rural Innovation.

It is recommended that income opportunities in animal agriculture be explored. Although regional and national trends are depressing for many animal enterprises, opportunities still exist for alternative production methods and value-added marketing possibilities.

It is recommended that the district explore program areas to assist public decision-makers relative to land use planning including zoning with respect to rural acreages, animal agriculture, etc.

COMMUNITY VISIONS: URBAN/RURAL ISSUES

Strengths

The creation of this issue team puts the SEREC/District in a unique and leading edge position concerning issues that are affecting rural, urban and ring communities in the urban edge. Issues like rural/urban interface, rural community development, urban community development, leadership development and diversity training are all timely topics that in one way or another are being discussed and need attention in order for communities in the SEREC/District to either retain or obtain strong sustainability.

It is evident that the District Director recognizes the importance of this issue and he needs to work directly with the team in further developing its direction.

Opportunities/Challenges

By publicly addressing the areas noted above, Extension in the SEREC/District will take on a visible role that will put it in contact with key players in the private and public sector. Citizens have an interest in what happens in their communities and will also become aware of Extension's work.

In several of the issue areas noted above Extension will be leading participants in the development of community policy. Extension Faculty/Staff will have to be vigilant to ensure that the institution is viewed as the impartial provider of information and objective facilitator of activities that lead to the development of policy.

Each of the topics identified by the issue team as needing attention have the potential to become very complex and require a long period of time before progress is demonstrated. They will also require working partnerships both within the university, and in the community. Work through this issue team may be an excellent way for Extension to enter into new working relationships with city, state and federal agencies.

Current Extension Faculty/Staff may need to either strengthen or learn new educational skills. This will ensure that educational programs developed and implemented will showcase Extension's state of the art knowledge of both content and presentation around these complex issues. This will be most important as contact is made with major community leaders for whom this may be their first contact with Extension.

Recommendations

The Review Team recommends that the Community Vision Team develop a more focused plan of work. While all of the topics are important, the SEREC/District may not have the Faculty/Staff at present to work on all issues at the same time. Issues selected should also be narrow enough so that Extension can demonstrate progress towards stated objectives.

The Review Team recommends that the Community Vision Team become familiar with the Kellogg Commission on the "Engaged Institution" and develop a systematic plan to engage other university resources not traditionally tapped by Extension. The Community Vision Team is perfectly poised to serve as the best liaison between the University and the community.

The Community Vision Team must establish a professional development plan that identifies critical skills that need to be strengthened, such as land use management, community strategic planning, political effectiveness, leadership development and diversity strengthening. Special attention should be given to training that will lead to recognized certification. This will enhance the credibility of Extension in having the expertise to address specific issues.

Faculty/Staff in the SEREC/District must engage in thoughtful discussion on how to diversify funding streams in order to venture into new programming areas and have the capacity to expand to meet these new educational needs. A diverse plan for fund development should be established. Extension Faculty/Staff should receive training in grant writing skills and in establishing partnerships that yield funding for Extension services.

Marketing should also be extensively discussed and a thoughtful plan should be established. This is most important if Extension will be venturing into areas not previously seen as part of the Extension portfolio of educational services. Emphasis should be given on having every member of the Extension team see himself/herself as a key player in the marketing plan.

Community Visions presents an excellent opportunity for the Educators/Assistants to work together in teams across academic disciplines. This is especially true if Extension's interest is to help the community address complex issues. In most instances the very nature of the complexity of the issues requires individuals from different academic disciplines to come together and develop working relationships that will attempt to bring to bear different perspectives and resources. If necessary, professional development should be considered to assist Faculty/Staff develop or enhance team-working skills.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

Strengths

The Review Team noted a wide range of activities in this area from the self-study document. The activities encompassed many issues that have had a positive impact on the SEREC/District. Programs have ranged from air quality to youth environmental education with extremely visible public programs like water and earth festivals, Festival of Color and Master Gardener programs.

These programs were not the efforts of one individual and many of the Faculty/Staff planned and participated in the activities. Pesticide container and pesticide disposal programs have been team efforts that have received a high level of public participation. These programs have also had a positive impact on the environment since they have decreased the likelihood of pesticides ending up in groundwater supplies.

This issue team cuts across many disciplines and has brought Faculty/Staff together that may not have traditionally worked together in the past as was evident in the review process.

Opportunities/Challenges

The Environmental Sustainability issue team identified the need for educational programs to be developed for both rural and urban audiences. These programs must encompass water quality issues and the need to educate developers and public officials on issues related to water quality and storm management. The Review Team agrees that these are educational needs, especially in the SEREC/District.

Lack of information presented in the self-study document and from oral comments suggest the need to work with limited-resource households. The Review Team would suggest the team look to national models where programs have been successful in this area.

The Environmental Sustainability issue team discussed the use of the internet. The Review Team felt clientele in this area are likely to access web-based information. Sites such as Lawn and Garden Central could meet some of the need for home horticulture freeing up some time for Educators to focus on projects. Information on the web sites needs to be kept current and research based.

Recommendations

The Environmental Sustainability issue team identified the following issues in the self-study document as areas they needed help in to further the outreach of the district. The issues raised by the district team are denoted with a bullet (■) and the Review Team's responses follow.

- Develop a clear procedure to enable Educators to publish peer-reviewed NebFacts, NebGuides and Extension Circulars through the university system in a timely manner.
- Develop science-based curricula to provide current, pertinent programming for immediate and developing audiences.

The Review Team felt that administration should start the process of reviewing the currentness of the NebGuide system with needs for new publications in developing subject matter areas and updating old NebGuides with current recommendations. The team was also told that monies were to be set aside by Cooperative Extension administration for Educators to publish or update NebGuides. The Review Team felt the integrity of the review process should not be compromised to get the publications out at a quicker pace but reviewers should be encouraged to get reviews back in a more timely manner. The Review Team also felt that Educators should be encouraged to collaborate with Specialists to write publications in the areas in which they are working.

- Re-direct the SEREC/District research monies to fund and support split Educators/Specialist appointments (75 percent FTE local Extension educator /25 percent FTE district Research and Extension Specialist). We recommend the following discipline-based positions: domestic water and waste, pest and wildlife management, horticulture, urban non-point pollution and storm water management, and indoor air.
- Because of the need for environmental education for acreage and urban clientele, we support split Educator/Program Coordinator appointments (75 percent FTE local Extension educator /25 percent FTE district program coordinator). We recommend the following interdisciplinary program coordinator positions: acreage program coordinator, sustainable urban development program coordinator.

The Review Team supports the idea of focused Educators. This process of focusing an Educator needs the review of the District Director and the individual Educator. Program coordinator positions were also supported by the Review Team. The responsibility of the coordinator would be to motivate and lead the planning processes for the issue team. The Review Team saw this format as an opportunity to address some of the needs of the developing urban/rural issues.

- Offer timely in-service training targeting environmental subject matter.

As Educators become more focused in program areas, inservice training becomes critical. Educators may look to state Specialists or for training opportunities outside of the state.

- Re-direct a greater percentage of Extension resources toward environmental issues important to Nebraska.
- Revisit the extension staffing formula and develop a method that more equitably distributes human resources between urban and rural counties.
- Redirect a greater and more equitable percentage of non-human resources toward urban programming.

The review discussed that urban dollars should be pursued for the developing urban needs. Care must be taken so that the feeling of taking rural dollars to meet the urban needs is not felt by Faculty/Staff and clientele. Creative efforts must be taken to secure funds and Faculty/Staff to make sure that the needs of urban audiences are met. As the urban rural interface develops, programs need to be in place to help the clientele work through the issues assisted by research based information.

FAMILY LIFE ISSUES

The Family Life Issue Team provides high quality, innovative, and responsive programs to meet

the needs of individuals and families within the SEREC/District. With the three most populated counties and nearly 2/3 of the state's population, educational efforts to help families make sound decisions that will positively impact individuals and families will continue to be important well into the future. The Review Team recognizes Family Life Education as an area of growth for Cooperative Extension programming efforts.

Strengths

The Review Team would like to compliment the Family Life Issue Team on the well organized report and presentation. It is obvious that the team members hold each other's talents and abilities in high esteem and work very well together.

The value of the key observer exercise was also noted by the Review Team. The importance of the information received by this effort and the organization required to facilitate the activity were evident. The Review Team believes this can serve as a model for other teams when seeking input from a targeted group of stakeholders.

The Family Life Issue Team identified key, cutting edge issues for future programming efforts. The Review Team recognizes efforts to prioritize programmatic needs and establish a time table for action.

The impacts resulting from programming within the five main areas of Nurturing Children, Parenting, Financial Management, Community Building and Interpersonal Relationships are truly impressive. The in-depth programs allow team members to focus and make a difference in people's lives. The Review Team recognizes the value and continuing need for these programs.

The Review Team took note of the breadth of linkages with partners that have been established in an effort to expand and preserve resources.

Opportunities/Challenges

With almost two-thirds of the state's population in this district, there are unlimited opportunities to impact individuals and families. With the range of topics in this issue area, developing programs to meet the most pressing needs of clientele will be the challenge. Establishing areas of specialization for research and public policy by each Educator to share with the team and to serve as a team contact can serve as a valuable tool in this effort.

Programming to address the current and future needs of families will require additional resources. Some options include grant writing, sub-contracting with other agencies, fee-based programming, as well as requests for additional funding in future budgets. A combination of funding sources will undoubtedly be needed to meet the growing financial needs of this program area. It may be helpful to consider jointly pursuing grant funding for a multi-county or regional program effort.

Recommendations

The Family Life Issue team asked the Review Team to respond to a series of questions regarding specific areas of concern. The issues raised by the district team are denoted with a bullet (■) and the Review Team's response follow.

- Is the district organizational strategy the best use of time and energy?
Establishing district teams and work groups will help you focus on the unique and specific needs of families within the SEREC/District. The Review Team recommends the continuation of the strong tie to state action teams. It is also recommended that a district program coordinator for family programs be identified. It is suggested that a rotation system be established to provide leadership opportunities for Extension Educators who indicate an interest in accepting this responsibility. This should provide the structure necessary to build upon the synergy created by the review process.

- Are we spreading ourselves too thin?

Establishing areas of specialization for research and public policy by Extension Educators for this issue team can serve as a model statewide. Communication with Extension Specialists, as well as research and teaching faculty in related areas, who can serve as a valuable resource in this effort is encouraged. Seek ways to interact with other issue teams where interests and expertise intersect.

- Will our Action Strategy tell us, what is the right program, for the right audience and the right delivery strategy?

Use the key observer/focus group model to assist in the continuing efforts to focus and prioritize program efforts. This can be an example for other teams as they seek and utilize stakeholder input.

- How do we reach the diverse audience and the families just above the poverty guidelines?
Is working with diverse audiences through established agencies the most effective strategy?

Study the strategies of agencies who successfully work with diverse audiences as a model for entry to interaction with specific clientele groups.

- When we partner, how do we find our niche? How do we balance the visibility of Extension with being a team player with our partners?

Continue to explore SEREC/District's role when collaborating with other partners offering programs in similar subject matter areas. Seek to find the niche for Cooperative Extension programming. Balance the need for visibility for Cooperative Extension and receiving "due credit" with coalition goals and practices.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES ISSUES

The Healthy Lifestyles Issue Team has produced local and statewide programming whose quality and well-documented impact have led to national acclaim. Unfortunately, national and state trends indicate there is much opportunity in the future for the healthy lifestyle education of clients (both youth and adult), and hopefully modification of behaviors which will lead to healthier Nebraskans.

Strengths

The Review Team would like to commend the Healthy Lifestyles Issue Team for articulating strong rationale and conducting needs assessments which have guided past programming decisions and future plans.

SEREC/District Educators have capitalized on the number of agencies and organizations in their district who have a common interest in lifestyle issues. They have been the leaders in initiating the building of several coalitions. These coalitions have led to pooling of resources resulting in addressing a broader audience than was possible by one group.

The Healthy Lifestyle Issues Educators' expertise seems to be in alignment with the needs identified in the report. Therefore, the team is poised to respond to these needs with virtually no lag time needed for position redirection.

Opportunities/Challenges

The report and presentation reveal a broad array of healthy lifestyles subjects for future pursuit. It is not possible to adequately address each of these subjects. Consequently, determining which of the subjects will become the Educators' niche is the challenge. Those subjects which Educators are clearly best suited to address, by virtue of resources (human and financial) and of most dramatic clientele need, should be those that drive program planning.

Based on existing need and potential clientele, the Healthy Lifestyles Team has the potential to have tremendous impact on choices and lifestyles in Nebraska. Because of these opportunities, their programming will likely become the model for other Nebraska Cooperative Extension Educators. Continuing to develop an excellent trail describing the program planning process and related impacts will help others to replicate or modify SEREC/District healthy lifestyles programming for adaption to their local needs.

The existing needs, the potential urban and rural clientele numbers, and the healthy lifestyles subject matter intersect to offer many options for grant writing, contract-for-service arrangements, fee-based programming, and requests for support for additional funding in upcoming budget years. Pursuing any one of these strategies will not result in sufficient funding to meet the needs of District clientele. Therefore, careful attention needs to be paid to seeking a mix of strategies that establishes a strong financial programming base. Language and literacy may be two barriers that will limit programming effectiveness with diverse

audiences. Support should be sought for translation of materials and programs into the "primary" languages represented in the District. It would be helpful if these materials were developed for those with basic reading and advanced reading skills.

Recommendations

It is recommended SEREC/District Educators capitalize on food safety as a mechanism to reach into diverse audiences. Many entry-level food service positions are being filled by diverse employees who will need food safety training. Additionally, some of the healthy lifestyles issues may be culturally based (for example, stress and time management) and food safety is not-everyone needs to eat, and be aware of safe ways of storing and preparing food.

Carefully consider delivery strategies as they relate to what you want to accomplish and who you want to serve. Some delivery choices segment clientele immediately, and although some of the most innovative programming may have been developed, the potential audience is diminished by the limitation of access to technology. (This is a growing issue commonly referred to as the "Digital Divide.")

When partnering with other agencies and organizations, make clear to them and your key stakeholders, why you are involved in healthy lifestyles programming. Further, articulate the need for visibility for Cooperative Extension through any publicity associated with the partnership. This need should be discussed at the beginning of the partnership.

In those situations where you are considering distance delivery strategies, seek sustainable formats (web, video-tape, home study) that are less time consuming for the programmer, asynchronous, and easily maintained. To enhance client contact with Cooperative Extension, consider supporting phone bridges, e-mail or chatrooms which allow questions, answers and discussion with Educators.

YOUTH ISSUES

Strengths

The Youth Issue Team has a clear understanding of the complex make-up of the SEREC/District and how this complexity impacts educational programs that must be offered. Four of the five priority areas identified address critical areas in both youth development and environmental stewardship. The fifth priority area clearly recognizes the need for continued focused attention to Faculty/Staff issues such as number of hours worked, professional development and need for specialized human resources.

Youth in both rural and urban communities will continue to be reached through strong and relevant 4-H programs. Other youth development educational programs will also be explored and used.

Establishing partnerships with other educational systems and organizations that provide youth services has been identified as an important way to extend the impact of the Nebraska Extension youth efforts in the community.

Opportunities/Challenges

Because of the unique composition of the SEREC/District the Youth Issue Team will continue to be on the edge of new and emerging trends, such as:

- Continued growth in the number of youth in the district,
- Continued growth by diverse audiences,
- Continued introduction or expansion of other youth serving programs and/or agencies that may be perceived as competitors to Extension, and
- Continued demand for more 4-H programs being delivered in new and unique ways.

The challenge presented is how to respond to all these opportunities without diminishing the high quality of Extension youth services, that continue to over burden Faculty/Staff with additional work and lose the Extension identity and visibility in the community.

Expanding and creating new partnerships will become more essential to reaching larger number of youth. Partnerships will range from simple Faculty/Staff to Faculty/Staff working relationships to partnerships established between organizations. Extension must have the capacity to encourage and support partnership relationships from the simple to the complex.

It is highly unlikely that traditional funding streams (federal, state and county) will be able to provide funding commensurate with the demand that will be placed on Extension for expanded youth services. The challenge is not to shy away from this demand but, rather, to find new funding sources to allow expansion.

Recommendations

The Learning Experience

Extension Educators are viewed as experts in youth development. At the same time other individuals and organizations in the communities SEREC/District serves are also expanding or developing their own expertise in youth development.

Profession development for Extension Educators becomes extremely critical if Extension is to continue to be perceived as the leader in this area. The Review Team recommends that the Youth Issue Team along with appropriate state and district leadership Faculty/Staff develop a long-term development plan that addresses the most critical need areas. Emphasis should be given to development of expertise in areas where there are current gaps in yet there are demands

in the community for assistance. Examples could be in workforce preparation, natural resources, and citizenship/leadership.

The Review Team recommends the revision of curriculum being used with school systems be given priority to ensure that state and local school district standards are being met. Without this assurance school districts will not be able to use Extension to enhance their educational mission.

World Leader Image

The Review Team recognizes that Extension can no longer take pride in being perceived as the hidden jewel in the community. This is most important in the SEREC/District where there are many providers of educational services that could be easily perceived as either being duplicative or in direct competition with Extension.

The Review Team recommends that the district develop a comprehensive public relations and marketing plan. This plan should be developed to cover the entire district, be cross-discipline and require that all Faculty/Staff see themselves as public relations and marketing agents for Extension within their area of work. District leadership may want to seek the aid of an expert in public relations/marketing to develop a plan.

The plan should be focused and have goals and objectives that are deemed important to the future of Extension in the SEREC/District. Be very specific as to what Extension wants to get out of all the time and effort that will be placed in the development and implementation of the plan. Do you want more money for a specific programming effort, do you want more participants to attend a specific programming activity, do you want key community leaders to become advocates for Extension during the next county budget deliberations?

Youth Development Profession

The Review Team recognizes that Extension Assistants working in youth development are in a unique position to pilot a flexible Faculty/Staff scheduling initiative. A limited pilot could be implemented in one or two counties where Extension Assistants have clearly demonstrated a consistent pattern of working well beyond 40 hours per week, many evenings and weekends and having to work with multiple groups or organizations at the same time or with conflicting schedules. County partners (boards) will have to be convinced that a flexible schedule does not diminish services to clients.

Please refer to the Overarching Issues recommendations that address diversity and the metropolitan team for suggestions on how to address the inclusion of diverse audiences and Faculty/Staff and how to better work in an urban setting.

Strategic Partnerships

The Review Team recognizes and commends the district for its work in developing working partnerships at all levels. This will continue to be an ever-expanding way of doing business in the future. Many funding sources are giving greater weight to grants that represent a consortium of partners addressing complex community needs through comprehensive programs.

One of the key constituencies that the public relations/marketing plan could target is elected officials. This could be under the heading of Political Effectiveness. Beyond simple awareness of Extension what else is being sought from these individuals? Assistance in obtaining more funding, introductions to other government agencies that have money that could be tapped by Extension, advocates for specific Extension programs, etc.?

The Review Team recommends that a taskforce be organized to develop a fund development plan. This taskforce should be district-wide and include Faculty/Staff from all academic Faculty/Staff, state Specialists and district leadership. There are multiple ways of raising funds beyond the creation of a grant writer position.

The Review Team recommends that the Youth Issue Team explore ways Extension Educators can become a resource to other youth serving agencies and be seen as experts that should be consulted in the development of public policy affecting youth.

The Review Team recommends that the Youth Issue Team become familiar with the W.K Kellogg Foundation, The Engaged Institution, report and explore ways how district Faculty/Staff can be the link between the university and the community. Special emphasis should be given to departments not currently involved with Extension.

RESEARCH ISSUES

Strengths

The self-study document indicates that relevant research based programming efforts are underway in Southeast Nebraska. The location of the SEREC/District provides opportunities for collaborative relationships with many University of Nebraska Researchers/Specialists. SEREC/District faculty are very supportive of an integrated Research/Extension program in southeastern Nebraska.

Opportunities/Challenges

SEREC/District faculty need to increase efforts to identify research priorities for southeastern Nebraska. They also need to broaden the linkages between SEREC/District and campus units beyond IANR that can address research issues in Southeast Nebraska. Further, they need to strengthen the day-to-day working relationships between Educators of the SEREC/ District and the faculty based within IANR departments.

Recommendations

The Review Team urges the Director of the SEREC/District and IANR Department Heads/Chairs to work together to provide opportunities for the clientele/faculty of SEREC/District to give input to the identification of research issues impacting Southeast Nebraska. Involvement of SEREC/District is essential in providing adequate access by the SEREC/District Educators and clientele to crucial research based information. It was suggested by several individuals that the development of a team to address urban issues in a multi-disciplinary, multi campus, Research/Extension format would be beneficial.

The Director of the SEREC/District should be included as an evaluation partner when assessing the contributions of the Specialists with assignments targeting Southeast Nebraska.

The SEREC/District is encouraged to continue to build program linkages beyond the IANR so to be a conduit and contributing partner to University-wide Research/Extension efforts that will impact the residents of the Southeast Nebraska. Use this opportunity to increase the visibility of SEREC/District within the University system.

Inclusion of Campus-based faculty on a regular basis in program planning activities of the SEREC/District should be explored as a means of increasing communications. Opportunities for applied research conducted jointly by Researchers/Educators should be encouraged.

SUMMARY

The Review Team concentrated on recommendations that will assist the SEREC/District better position itself to be effective in the coming five years. It is the expectation of the current Review Team that the Faculty/Staff will discuss and prioritize the recommendations of the current review report. After the prioritization, it is anticipated that the Faculty/Staff will develop processes for implementation of the highest priority recommendations.

Questions raised by Dr. Cantrell on page 133 of the comprehensive self-study document were discussed by the Review Team. In summary, the Review Team does not recommend a new structure for the SEREC/District nor the development of a Metropolitan District. However, the Review Team is concerned about the limited amount of administrative and support Staff available in the SEREC/District headquarters. Discussions with the Deans and Vice Chancellor are suggested as a means for identifying future partnership positions. Involvement of program coordinators who lead District action teams is one option of program leadership for the District.

Dr. Cantrell also identified (page 133) the need to reach out to more diverse segments of the population; and to increase the expectations for applied research across the district. Comments in other sections of this report address these items. The Review Team believes that each of these items are significant and critical to SEREC/District Faculty/Staff.

The SEREC/District has unlimited opportunities for working with a cross-section of the University system. Because the programming opportunities are almost limitless, focus and prioritization may be two of the most critical issues facing the Faculty/Staff of the SEREC/District. Additionally the SEREC/District plays a critical, visible role in working with decision makers located in the Lincoln/Omaha area who assume statewide leadership roles. It is important for this unit to make itself available to these decision makers as an educational resource. Consequently this adds an additional dimension to the priority setting process.

The Review Team is pleased with the evaluation completed by the SEREC/District Faculty/Staff of their programs and the issues identified as important to Southeast Nebraska. The Team feels that Faculty/Staff have studied, debated and positioned themselves to provide the best answers for the questions raised. The Review Team's impressed with the understanding by the Faculty/Staff of the issues, and their program ideas. Our thanks for the excellent preparation in connection with this review. Keep up the great work!

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